

Looking back

Duxbury's George Goldstein reflects on his role in founding of temple

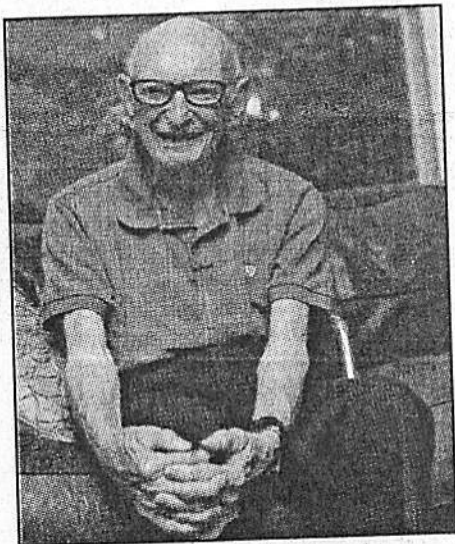
By Jeanne M. Rideout
Correspondent

DUXBURY - "Make it a better world going out than coming in," George Goldstein said as he sat in the living room of the Duxbury home of his son, Steve.

Goldstein, a founding member of Temple B'nai Shalom in Braintree and former longtime resident of that town, has had 102 years to make the world better. Recently, Goldstein returned to Massachusetts from Florida after nearly 40 years to live with his only son.

"When I moved to Braintree, I was only there for two weeks and my doorbell rang, and somebody came to the

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After nearly 40 years in Florida, George Goldstein now lives in Duxbury with his son Steve. STAFF

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GEORGE

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door on behalf of the United Jewish Appeal," he said. "I asked, 'Where is the synagogue in Braintree?' He said, 'There is none.' I said, 'Why not?'"

The man at the door replied that there were not enough Jewish families in Braintree for a synagogue. Five months passed, and Goldstein noticed how rapidly Braintree was growing, with new housing developments springing up.

"There must be more Jewish families in town," Goldstein said he thought to himself. "It's about time we had a synagogue in Braintree."

So the journey began.

As interest in having a Braintree temple grew, a discussion arose as to whether the denomination would be Conservative or Reform. A younger group wanted Reform.

"I'm not a hypocrite," one young man said. "I like to eat lobster."

"I talked them into a Conservative temple," Goldstein said.

Goldstein's persuasive abilities come from an affinity to law. After graduation from Boston English High School in 1927, he went to Northeastern University Law School, graduating in 1931.

"That's how you did it in those days," Steve said. "You went to law school right from high school."

During his law school days, George worked in a factory. Upon graduation, he took a job as a clerk in a law office. However, this was the Great Depression, and there was little work for attorneys.

"Mostly we sat in the office talking," George said. "I graduated from law school and took a \$2 cut in pay."

George left the law practice and went to work at General Electric, where he worked until he retired and moved to Florida.

In August 1927, George was among the people winding silently through a funeral parlor in Boston's North End where the bodies of Ferdinando Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti lay on display, with visible burn marks on their foreheads from their electrocution. The Italian immigrants had been convicted of a 1920 murder committed during an armed robbery in South Braintree, and to this day the debate continues as to whether Sacco and Vanzetti were convicted due to the evidence presented by the prosecution or because they were anarchist members of a militant organization.

"I think I'm the only person left in the world who saw that," George said.

Once George decided it was time for Braintree to have a synagogue, families in the town's Jewish community responded to his leadership, friendship and strong faith by moving forward to making that dream a reality. In the beginning, the group of worshippers rented space in the only available facility, a veterans hall.

"Can you imagine having meetings and smelling beer?" George asked.

A Braintree minister heard the story and invited the fledgling Jewish congregation to worship in his church building, saying "A barroom is no place to hold services."

Then George heard about a building being sold by an architect business and purchased what was to become Temple B'nai Shalom.

"We started to make a temple out of the building," he said. "I got an ark and two Torahs (the handwritten five books of Moses). We hired a rabbi and started services."

The synagogue first welcomed worshippers in 1959, drawing on the Jewish communities in Braintree, Holbrook and Randolph.

"For a small group in a small community, we had a great group," George said.

The membership grew, and children grew up. The day came when the daughter of a temple member was old enough to begin studying for her bat mitzvah. A girl has her bat mitzvah at 12, and a boy has his bar mitzvah at 13.

The girl's father was reluctant because the closest synagogue where his daughter could study was in Quincy and he worried he would have nobody to teach her.

"I remember what I learned in Hebrew school," George said. "I'll teach her."

From then until he and his wife Estee moved to Florida in 1976, George was the temple's Hebrew teacher. He was 67 when he moved.

"I never thought I would live that long," he said with a smile.

Estee died in early July. She was 99.

"We were married nearly 75 years," George said. "When she died, she was one month short to the day of reaching 100 and five weeks short of celebrating our 75th wedding anniversary."

George remembers Estee as a vibrant woman.

"In the course of a lifetime, she was a very active woman and did a lot of volunteer work. She was the national service officer for Jewish War Veterans, an organization that advocates on behalf of disabled Jewish veterans and their families," he said. "She was just a remarkable woman."

Goldstein and Estee brought about reforms that

transformed a local synagogue into the major temple of South Florida.

The couple had one son, Steve, and George has two adult grandchildren, Jenna and Dean Robert, and one 6-year-old great-granddaughter, daughter of Dean Robert and Suzie Goldstein.

Among the members of Temple B'nai Shalom is Braintree Superintendent of Schools Peter Kurzberg.

"As it turns out, he is, at 102, as lucid as any of us," Kurzberg said of George.

When people ask George what he attributes his longevity to, he said he tells the following story.

"When Ponce de Leon discovered Florida, the Indians told him about the Fountain of Youth, saying if he drank from the fountain he would be forever young. Ponce de Leon spent his whole life looking for that fountain. He tasted water from lakes, rivers, ponds and spas, wherever he went," George said.

He paused to smile.

"After 500 years, I have discovered the Fountain of Youth," George said. "Nowhere did the Indians ever mention water. When you associate with young people, you are drinking from the Fountain of Youth. I have been working with children for more than 50 years, and that is the secret."

George's advice to those who aspire to be 100 and beyond is to keep active.

"Always have a project ahead. You can't die until you've finished that project," he said.

According to George, the world has changed.

"This is not my world," he said. "It's a different world. My world was radio and TV. Today what you have is dot-com. That is not my world."

Over a century of living, George has seen some of the darkest hours and brightest moments in history, and through it all he retains his love of life.

When he was a student at Boston English, every day he passed Fenway Park on his way home. There was an auto repair shop across from Fenway. He and his friends used to climb onto the roof of the shop and watch the ball games.

"Many a time I saw Babe Ruth hit a home run," George recalled.

To this day, he is a Red Sox fan.

Three weeks ago, entering the Temple B'nai Shalom for the first time in nearly 40 years was a rewarding experience for George.

"One man came to me (and said), 'You prepared me for my bar mitzvah. I'd like you to meet my son,'" George said.